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# TAPOL REPORT

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Memo to all East Timor solidarity groups:

## The Pope's visit to East Timor

Pope John Paul's visit to East Timor on 12 October thrust East Timor onto the world's headlines when people at the mass shouted pro-independence slogans, unfurled a pro-Fretilin banner and were then ferociously attacked in the presence of the world's press. This shattered Jakarta's plan to use the visit to legitimise integration. Many were arrested and have been tortured to extract confessions compromising the church. This Memo summarises these events and suggests follow-up actions to support the Timorese people at a time of intense repression.

Attendance at the mass Although 400,000 were expected to come, only 80,000 turned up. There was tight security round Taci-Tolu and most who came arrived in naval vessels and army trucks from West Timor and other parts of Indonesia. Bishop Belo told the foreign press many of the faithful were afraid to come for fear of the army. Before the mass, when the Pope drove to Dili to consecrate the new cathedral, the streets of Dili were deserted.

The Pope's sermon In his sermons before coming to Dili, the Pope praised Pancasila. In East Timor, he acknowledged that "many innocent people" have died, called for "reconciliation" between the Timorese and the Indonesians, and said that "respect for rights which render life more humane must be further assured". He also said: "I pray that those who have responsibility for life in East Timor will act with wisdom and goodwill towards all." He said nothing to embarrass the forces of occupation: on the contrary, he appealed to them only to treat their victims better, in effect legitimising their presence. He even avoided saying anything about birth control, reserving criticism of Indonesia's family planning programme to a statement on the last day of his Indonesian tour, in Medan. On only one issue did he resist pressure from Jakarta - he refused to integrate the East Timor church into the Indonesian Bishops' Conference.

Fretilin has expressed deep disappointment because the visit has implicitly endorsed integration. The former head of the East Timor church, Mgr Martinhu Costa Lopes has expressed great sadness because the people of East Timor wanted the Pope to say something positive but he confined himself to abstractions.

The demonstration at the mass The fullest accounts of what happened were written by journalists of La Stampa (Italy) and El Pais (Spain). [According to La Stampa of 13 October, only they, an Australia TV team and some Indonesian journalists, were there up to the end.] Just as the Pope was ending the mass with "*Ite missa est*", dozens of people started shouting independence slogans in Portuguese and Tetum. Some broke the

TAPOL, the Indonesia human rights campaign.
111 Northwood Road, Thornton Heath, Surrey CR4 8HW, Telephone and Fax 01 771 2904

security cordons shouting "Long live the Pope" and were beaten back by security forces using truncheons. The Pope watched for a few moments but did not show any concern at the behaviour of the troops. Later a Vatican spokesman said the Pope "had not been disturbed by the protests". As he left, the site turned into a battlefield. Then, a second wave of several hundred demonstrators approached the altar, unfurling a banner which said "Fretilin greets the Pope". The troops became more violent, beating them to the back of the esplanade while journalists waged their own battle with the troops. Two had their cameras snatched and the film exposed. The demonstrators defended themselves by throwing chairs and stones at the troops. The Pope immediately left East Timor, cancelling a meeting with ICRC officials. There is no evidence that he protested to his hosts about what was happening even though he had just spoken about the need to respect people's rights.

The crackdown According to Bishop Belo who was contacted by phone the following day, 40 demonstrators were arrested and were being tortured and beaten by the military to make confessions that would implicate the church. Another five had taken refuge in his home. (Reports that eight people were executed immediately after the mass have not been confirmed.) The bishop said: "I am shocked that the military is extracting false confessions under torture. The boys were trying to express their discontent with the situation in East Timor. It is a lie that the church is in any way involved in the demonstration." He asked the Pope to intercede on behalf of the victims but as far as we know, the Pope has not done so. [Press communique of Australian Coalition for East Timor]

Bishop Belo continues to speak out The bishop spoke to many foreign journalists before and during the Pope's visit. In September, he told Barbara Mead of *The Catholic Leader* [10 September 1989]: "Bishops and priests can speak out but the people cannot. They dare not speak out for their rights. They know there will be revenge." He told *Kyodo* [11 October] that he had been interrogated for three days about his letter to the UN. He spoke out against Indonesia's birth control programme and said: "The people fear they are in danger of genocide and have strong sympathy for Fretilin." According to the *BBC*, he said that children waving Indonesian flags to greet the Pope at the airport had been obliged to do so by the army who "like God, are omnipresent".

"The bishop has not softened his stance," said Juliet Rix of the *BBC*. "Many believe he is firing his last shots... and that after a decent interval will be transferred away from East Timor." [Juliet Rix on *BBC Radio 4*, 14 October]

Follow-up actions

We are taking the following actions and urge you to do the same:

1. To write to the Pope to intercede with Jakarta on behalf of those victimised for carrying out a peaceful demonstration in his presence, and to criticise his visit for implicitly endorsing integration.
2. To write to the Vatican ambassador in your own country, as well as to the head of the Catholic church, calling for church intercession.
3. To urge the Portuguese Government to cut off negotiations with the Indonesian Government regarding a visit to East Timor by Portuguese MPs, and to ask your local PET members to do likewise.
4. To write to your own government calling for urgent intervention on behalf of those arrested following the Pope's visit.
5. To write to the UN Secretary-General stressing that the demonstration during the Pope's visit proves there is an urgent need to find a solution for East Timor in line with Belo's call for a referendum.